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George W. Plunkitt, 1842–1924, assemblyman, alderman, state senator, and
“honest grafter”

Honest Graft?

How George Washington Plunkitt Became *Plunkitt of Tammany Hall*

TERRENCE J. MCDONALD

When Tammany Hall politician George Washington Plunkitt died in 1924, the *Nation* called him “one of the wisest men in American politics” and declared that a 1905 book collecting his wisdom, *Plunkitt of Tammany Hall*, told “all that needs to be told about American politics.” The truth was, the *Nation* opined, that “honesty doesn’t matter, efficiency doesn’t matter, progressive vision doesn’t matter. What matters is the chance of a better job, a better price for wheat, better business conditions.” Although Plunkitt was a “grafter,” his constituents did not care because “they could understand a cheerful and honest grafter who made no pretense of virtue but did practical good right and left every day in the week, better than they could a seventh-day reformer who talked of the public welfare and did nothing tangible for anybody.”

Although it may seem ironic that a Tammany Hall “grafter” would receive an accolade in a “reform” magazine like the *Nation*, in fact, this response is typical of the way this book has been received throughout the twentieth century. Subtitled *A Series of Very Plain Talks on Very Practical Politics* and edited by New York *Evening Post* reporter William L. Riordon, *Plunkitt of Tammany Hall* went through three editions and became one of the two or three most frequently cited twentieth-century sources on American urban politics. The twenty-two “interviews” and one diary extract in the book contributed the term “honest graft”—profit made from inside information about municipal improvements—to the American lexicon. They also affirmed the image of the ward boss as a humorous Irish rogue who was in politics for his own advantage, but who did good things for others along the way. Plunkitt scorned

book learning and political oratory, claiming that he worked in politics “as a business,” and kept his power by “studying human nature and acting accordin’,” i.e., by providing various types of personal recognition and political patronage. Plunkitt’s motto was “I seen my opportunities and I took ’em,” and he admitted he became a millionaire through real estate investment in areas where values were about to increase as a result of government projects. But he also found jobs and did favors for his constituents and maintained his power, and Tammany’s, as a result.

For many readers, *Plunkitt of Tammany Hall* has been a lesson in “realistic” liberalism, a brand of politics based not on moralistic views of human nature, but on responses to human needs. A key to Tammany’s success—a cue to twentieth-century liberalism—seems to be found in Plunkitt’s diary of daily services to his constituents. It chronicles his bailing out a bartender at 2 a.m., his kindness to fire victims, court appearances, and job finding on behalf of constituents, as well as his attendance at weddings, funerals, parish bazaars, and political meetings in his district in New York’s Upper West Side.

Until recently, little has been known about Plunkitt, Riordon, or the circumstances leading to the publication of the book, despite the book’s centrality to our understanding of urban politics. The rich resources of the Columbia University Libraries, including the Edwin Patrick Kilroe Collection of Tammaniana in the Rare Book and Manuscript Library, allow us to investigate these men and their relationship, and the picture is, not surprisingly, more complicated than previous accounts have supposed. Plunkitt was a powerful Tammany Hall politician, but the book’s editor, Riordon, played a more important role in its production than previously thought. Plunkitt may not even have spoken some of the most famous phrases in the book; and at the time that it was published, he was already well on the way to political oblivion, a trip speeded by the appearance of the work.

George Washington Plunkitt was born in New York City on November 17, 1842, in an area of the Upper West Side of

Manhattan that was later incorporated into Central Park at about West Eighty-fourth Street. His parents were illiterate Irish immigrants, and his father worked as a laborer. Plunkitt attended public schools from the age of about six until he was eleven, when he began driving horse carts for construction projects in his neighborhood. He was later apprenticed to a brush maker and then to a butcher. By 1865 he owned his own butcher shop in the Washington Market. Around 1876 he sold his shop and went into contracting and real estate investment on the Upper West Side. Later he became a director of the Riverside Bank and claimed to have become a millionaire through these activities. At some point he married and had one child, although he never spoke of his family.

Plunkitt's public political career began with an unsuccessful run for the New York State Assembly in 1866 when he was twenty-four years old. He ran successfully for the same position in 1868 and won reelection in 1869 and 1870. That same year, while serving in the state legislature, he was elected to the first of four one-year terms as a New York City alderman. He would later claim the distinction of having held four offices simultaneously in the early seventies—assemblyman, county supervisor, alderman, and police magistrate—and he was also a deputy commissioner of street cleaning for six years in that decade. In 1883, he was elected to the New York State Senate, serving until defeated for renomination in 1887. Elected again to the senate in 1891, he stepped down for reasons of health in 1893 but was reelected to the senate in 1899 and served there until defeated in 1904. Plunkitt never explained why he first went into politics, but he never forgot why he lost his first race and won his second: In his unsuccessful race in 1866, he ran without the endorsement of the Tammany Hall Democracy; in the second, he ran with it. For the rest of his life, Plunkitt would be a Tammany Hall candidate.

For readers today "Tammany Hall" may be the most confusing thing about *Plunkitt of Tammany Hall*. This is natural because in Plunkitt's day "Tammany Hall" meant two different things. One of these was a building called "Tammany Hall" that was owned by a men's benevolent organization, like today's Masons or Knights of



Tammany Hall, home of the Tammany Society and the "Tammany Hall" faction of the New York City Democratic party

Columbus, that called itself the "Tammany Society or Columbian Order." The other "Tammany Hall" was a faction of the New York City Democratic party that rented its headquarters and meeting space in the Tammany Hall building from the Tammany Society.

This was the Tammany Hall Democracy, the political organization or “machine” that by the turn of the century had become synonymous with the Democratic party in the city.

Plunkitt belonged to both organizations and rose to positions of high responsibility in each. From 1880 until 1905 he was a district leader for the Tammany Hall political organization in which capacity he coordinated Tammany activities in his assembly district (the area roughly between Forty-ninth and Fifty-first Streets from Eighth Avenue to the Hudson River) and was one of thirty or so men who served on the executive committee of the organization that, in cooperation with the “boss” or leader, made its overall policy. Initiated into the Tammany Society in 1882 (by which time it was a sort of “old boys club” for prominent local Democrats on good terms with the machine), he was elected one of thirteen “Sachems” or chiefs of the organization in 1897 and again in 1900, a position he held until his death.

Plunkitt was highly regarded within Tammany. The organization’s official newspaper, *The Tammany Times*, declared in 1895 that Plunkitt was “one of nature’s noblemen” who had “devoted the best portion of his life to the interests of his constituents”; according to this account, “the name of George W. Plunkitt stands as a guarantee of good faith.” However, Plunkitt had sold his butcher shop because he found he could make a living in and through politics, both as a Tammany district leader and a state senator. In the state legislature he undoubtedly introduced bills for public works in New York City hoping to receive the contract and intending to employ his political supporters. But he also enriched himself in other ways: In 1872 he was indicted (but was never tried) for selling street railway franchises while he was an alderman; in the 1880s and 1890s he was alleged to be on the payroll of the New York Central Railroad while he served in the state legislature; and the newspapers charged that he had deals with the City Department of Streets, which rented properties from him at high rates, with the Department of Docks, from which he received construction con-

tracts, and with the city assessor, who under-assessed his properties for tax purposes. In both 1905 and 1913, it was alleged that he sold nominations for offices over which he had control on a scale that ranged from five hundred dollars for a local office to thirty-five thousand dollars for a state supreme court judgeship.

This system seemed to work for Plunkitt, but was it any way to run a city? Some of the best journalists in New York disagreed over the answer to this question. For those of the generation of New York *Evening Post* editor E. L. Godkin, the answer was a resounding "No." Godkin believed that the Tammany organization was not a real political party but "an organization of clever adventurers, most of them in some degree criminal, for the control of the ignorant and vicious vote of the city in an attack on the property of the taxpayers." And, according to Godkin's account in the 1890s, Plunkitt was "the greatest 'hustler' in Tammany Hall" with a record as a state senator in Albany that was "most unsavory." He was in politics "as a business," had "no hesitation in using his position for private gain," and was a "thoroughly bad senator." In part because of its makeup and intentions, Tammany stayed in power "not through its own strength, but through the supineness, indifference, and optimism of the rest of the community."

For those of the generation of Lincoln Steffens, however, the impotence of reformers like Godkin against the machine was rooted in their failure to recognize that Tammany ruled not in spite of its vices, but because of its virtues, which included kindness. In one of the most famous accounts of Tammany Hall, Steffens's 1903 article in *McClure's* magazine entitled "New York: Good Government in Danger," the muckraker argued that reformers had something to learn from the techniques of machine politicians. Tammany leaders made no bones about their corruption, but ruled through the suffrage of the people because they spread the fruits of their corruption widely. Steffens provided a lengthy list of the kindnesses of the district leaders and argued that "Tammany kindness was real kindness and went far." It was "living government, extra-legal, but very actual," and until reformers developed a system to

replace this kindness Tammany would continue to rule. The machine was vulnerable, though, because its kindness was financed by graft totaling “untold millions of dollars a year.” Steffens’s catalog of this graft was lengthy and detailed, and it ranged from kick-backs to the police from saloons and houses of gambling and prostitution to illicit profits on public works and on inside information about public improvements. Given all these sources of wealth, Steffens thought it was no wonder that the leaders of Tammany were wealthy; but as they grew wealthy district leaders were likely to become cruel. “Their charity is real, at first. But they sell out their own people. They do give them coal and help them in their private troubles, but, as they grow rich and powerful, the kindness goes out of the charity and they cause the troubles they relieve; they sacrifice the children in the schools; let the Health Department neglect the tenements; and, worst of all, plant vice in the neighborhood and in the homes of the poor.”

Although Steffens did not mention Plunkitt, his attack on graft was an attack on Tammany district leaders like Plunkitt, and his article was in part the stimulus for the publication of *Plunkitt of Tammany Hall*. The connection between Plunkitt and this discussion of the machine among reformers was made by William L. Riordon, the editor of *Plunkitt of Tammany Hall* who, it turns out, was a widely-known journalist in his own right, a sympathizer with the Tammany organization, and a colleague of Lincoln Steffens. To transform George Washington Plunkitt into *Plunkitt of Tammany Hall*, Riordon needed both a “character”—a way of presenting Plunkitt—and a “hook”—some focus on which to “hang” his story. The “correct” way to portray a Tammany boss was widely known among New York journalists and provided the first; Steffens’s article on New York when republished as part of Steffens’s 1904 book, *The Shame of the Cities*, provided the second.

Like Plunkitt, Riordon was an Irish-American and a Roman Catholic. Born in Richmond, Virginia, in 1861, he had set out to become a Catholic priest but left the seminary (allegedly because of

a fondness for drink) and began writing for newspapers in Washington, D.C. He came to New York in 1886 and covered politics for the New York *Commercial Advertiser* for five years before joining the *Post* in 1891, again as a political reporter. In 1899, Riordon was sent



William L. Riordon, 1861–1909, journalist
and editor of *Plunkitt of Tammany Hall*

to Albany to cover the state legislature for a year. At the time of his death in 1909, he was the *Post*'s city hall reporter, and one of the best-known journalists in New York. In his 1922 history of the *Post*, Allen Nevins wrote that Riordon was thought to be one of "the three most remarkable" reporters on the *Post* in the 1890s; Steffens was one of the other two. In fact, Steffens and Riordon worked together for five years on the *Post* (1892–1897) at a time when there were only six full-time reporters on the paper's staff. Nevins wrote

that Riordon could always be counted on “to have something worthwhile up his sleeve” when the *Post* needed to fill the paper, and noted that he was well liked among the local politicians and may have been a member of Tammany Hall.

Some of the stories Riordon dug up were probably interviews with Plunkitt. Riordon began his “interviews” with Plunkitt around the time of the New York municipal elections in 1897. Thereafter, they appeared mostly in local election years: 1897, 1901, 1903, and 1905 were the years of two-thirds of the fifteen original interviews that were included in the twenty-three chapters of the book. Although Plunkitt appears to be a colorful and quotable character in these interviews, it must be remembered that it may have been Riordon who made him this way. Indeed, the “correct” way to portray a ward boss was well understood among writers of the day. As a critic in the *Bookman* in 1903 wrote, “the Tammany boss has always been, we have been led to believe, an essentially blunt, matter-of-fact, semi-humorous personage. He never really quite takes himself seriously. Like Byron’s buccaneer, he’s ‘the mildest mannered man that ever scuttled ship or cut a throat.’ ” Plunkitt certainly fit this bill, but these interviews lacked both a focus and a theme. If the series had ended then he would have been remembered simply as a somewhat colorful exponent of the spoils system and home rule for New York City. In none of the interviews in the *Post* is there mention of a diary, comments about opportunities seen and taken, or a theory of “honest” graft.

Undoubtedly, Riordon found the focus for *Plunkitt* when *The Shame of the Cities* appeared in book form in 1904. Both the seventh chapter of *Plunkitt of Tammany Hall*, “On ‘The Shame of the Cities,’ ” and the more important first chapter of the book, “Honest and Dishonest Graft,” are direct responses to Steffens. Furthermore, in the chapter entitled “The Strenuous Life of the District Leader,” the supposed excerpts from Plunkitt’s diary listing his many kindnesses are the same kindnesses that Steffens had listed in his article on New York. None of these “interviews” appears outside the book. The chapter on “Honest and Dishonest Graft,” perhaps

the best known in the book, was an obvious attempt to defend Tammany from Steffens's charge that its "kindnesses" were financed by "graft" that to a great extent came from kickbacks from criminals and gamblers. On the contrary, Riordon's Plunkitt claimed the wealth of Tammany leaders—including his own millions—came from the real estate investment he called "honest" graft.

When Riordon died in 1909, the professional journalists' newspaper *Editor and Publisher* attributed to him the famous phrases of *Plunkitt of Tammany Hall*, claiming that "he gave to the English speaking world the phrase 'honest graft' " and noting that Plunkitt was "made to say" what Riordon wrote. Whether or not this is true, we do know that to construe Plunkitt as a "semi-humorous" rogue, frank about his grafting, but redeemed in the end by his kindnesses, Riordon made important choices about what he included in and excluded from the book. Besides adding the "interviews" that were directly stimulated by *The Shame of the Cities*, he decided to leave out the information that Plunkitt had suffered an important political defeat the year before the book was published.

Plunkitt's slide into local political oblivion began in November of 1904 when he was defeated for reelection to his seat in the state senate by a man who was half his age, a political newcomer, a college and law school graduate, a reformer, and, perhaps worst of all, a Republican. Martin Saxe was born in 1874 and raised in a neighborhood not far from Plunkitt's. He attended public schools in the district, but went on to prep school and Princeton University where he studied law, philosophy, history, and literature. He graduated from the New York Law School in 1897 and practiced law privately before joining the city corporation counsel's office in 1902 during the reform mayoralty of Seth Low. Saxe campaigned hard in the district, going door to door to meet voters and holding many rallies at which he made the point that Plunkitt's self-enriching deals in the state legislature had "mortgaged" the district to railroad and other interests at the same time that Plunkitt's twenty years of district leadership and six previous terms in the state senate had pre-

vented younger men from taking leadership there. No one could have been more surprised than Plunkitt when Saxe won the election by more than six hundred votes.

Plunkitt's loss to Saxe emboldened an opponent from within Tammany Hall itself, Assemblyman Thomas J. "The" McManus.



George W. Plunkitt seated on his rostrum, the bootblack stand at the New York County Courthouse

Since he first won election to the state assembly as an "independent" (i.e. non-Tammany) candidate in 1891, McManus had been a thorn in Plunkitt's political side. Born in 1864, and thus twenty-two years younger than Plunkitt, McManus was an attorney with a reputation as an orator who carried on a series of campaigns for the assembly through the 1890s, sometimes with Plunkitt's blessing and sometimes against Plunkitt's hand-picked candidates. Supported within the district by his mother and six brothers—who were a formidable political force themselves—and his own political club, the Thomas J. McManus Association, McManus steadily

built his political base against Plunkitt as he watched support for the older man wane. In June of 1905 the McManus Association unanimously endorsed McManus for election to Plunkitt's Tammany Hall leadership of the district. At the McManus Association picnic that August, the ten thousand in attendance were led in the campaign song:

Good-bye to Plunkitt boys,
He used us like play toys;
Now we'll stick to Tom McManus,
For "The" is true blue.
He'll stick to me and you
So we'll chase old Plunkitt to Gowanus.

Like Saxe, McManus alleged that Plunkitt had grown rich while doing little or nothing for his constituents, but McManus also claimed that Plunkitt made extra money by charging Tammany Hall candidates for their nominations. Both McManus and the city alderman from Plunkitt's district said Plunkitt had charged them five hundred dollars for their nominations. These allegations took on more validity when the book *Plunkitt of Tammany Hall* landed like a bombshell in the campaign. Campaigns for Tammany district leadership moved into their most intense stages in September. The 1905 election was scheduled for Tuesday, September 19. The book was released on September 1, and on September 2 and 3 New York newspapers began running excerpts from it. Once the book arrived and it was seen that Plunkitt was proud to admit he had gained his fortune through graft—albeit allegedly “honest” graft—all the charges against him seemed to carry more weight. Furthermore, the newspapers thereafter referred to him as “honest graft Plunkitt” or “the apostle of honest graft.” Nor could he take back the book's boasts about his millions or his willingness to see his opportunities and take them. Unfortunately, this was exactly what his political opponents were saying and to that they added the honorifics “tightwad” and “Vanderbilt.”

Four hundred police were assigned to the district on the day of the voting, and two calls for additional police help were put in during the day. More than fifty persons were arrested on charges ranging from voting fraud to assault. At midnight Plunkitt and his allies conceded defeat, and the supporters of McManus paraded through the district carrying a coffin at their head, symbolic of the political death of Plunkitt. The next fall McManus completed his triumph by nominating himself for the state senate seat that Plunkitt had held and winning that, too. In 1907 Plunkitt made an attempt to retake the district leadership that he had lost in 1905. Observers said from the start the attempt was futile; the outcome was a three-thousand vote slaughter that ended the Plunkitt era decisively.

Plunkitt lived on in political obscurity until 1924; yet the influence of "his" book persists. But as the above has demonstrated, *Plunkitt of Tammany Hall* is less a document describing how urban politics *was*, than the product of a debate over what urban politics *might be*. That debate continues today, as it should, because as the story of Plunkitt demonstrates, neither the "bosses" nor the "reformers" at the turn of the century had the final word.

The Photographs of Herbert H. Lehman



Inside the Old Crusaders' Fortress in Accre, Israel, 1959

Herbert H. Lehman (1878–1963), eminent New York state politician and world figure, was also a talented photographer. In his later years the former Governor avidly pursued the art of photography. During the 1950s he traveled in Europe, returning to places he had first visited in his role as Director-General of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) after the Second World War. Varying in scope from postcard-like landscapes to moody and enigmatic chiaroscuro studies, these photographs reveal the private side of the public man, the sensitivity and introspection of an artist.

An exhibition of Herbert H. Lehman's photographs will be on view in the Rare Book and Manuscript Library until February 26, 1993, and will be on view in the Lehman Suite from April 15, 1993, to September 15, 1993.



Florence, 1955



St. Moritz Lake, Switzerland, 1957



Azay-le Rideau, France, 1957



Ships in Harbor, undated



Snow Scene, 1955



En Route to Tivoli, Italy, 1957

Scandal in the Headlines

Theodore Roosevelt and the Panama Canal

JEAN WITTER

In 1908 a political scandal unfolded in American newspapers. Journalists questioned the United States government's financial and military role in the acquisition of the rights to the Panama Canal, and accusations of corruption in the Roosevelt administration flew. At the center of this scandal was William McMurtrie Speer, a forty-three-year-old editorial writer for the *New York World*.

On December 8, 1908, Speer wrote an editorial that infuriated President Theodore Roosevelt and shocked the nation. In this "history-making editorial," Speer all but calls Roosevelt a liar and suggests a full-scale congressional investigation of the Panama Canal acquisition. Speer writes, "... the fact that Theodore Roosevelt as President of the United States issues a public statement about such an important matter full of flagrant untruths, reeking with misstatements, challenging line by line the testimony of his associate... makes it imperative that full publicity come at once through the authority and by the action of Congress."

Roosevelt was so angered by the *World* editorial and articles in the *Indianapolis News* that a week later he read a special message before Congress recommending the government sue the *New York World* and the *Indianapolis News* for libel. The legal battle that followed became a blot on Roosevelt's political record and a champion cause for First Amendment freedom of the press.

Speer's notes and records of the Panama libel case were recently acquired by the Rare Book and Manuscript Library. A gift from Mrs. Ann Satterthwaite, the collection totals eleven thousand items relating to Speer's many-faceted career: journalist, public official, lawyer, inventor, businessman, publisher, and author. The papers pertaining to the Panama libel case clearly show Speer to have been

a thorough investigative reporter. The drafts of his articles and editorials that appeared in the *World*, letters from informants, copies of supporting evidence in his case against Roosevelt, and personal



William McMurtie Speer, 1865–1923, revealed the Panama Canal scandal in his 1908 New York *World* editorial

notes are important sources of information relating to the Panama Canal scandal and reveal the mood of an era in American history when a journalist's yellow pen confronted a president's big stick.

To understand Speer's role in the Panama Canal affair, it is necessary to be familiar with the political and cultural climate out of

which the controversy grew. The first decade of the twentieth century marked a change in the American presidency. As the country sorted out changing policies at home, focus began to shift from domestic to foreign concerns. Improvements in transportation by rail and sea made the world smaller. Nations vied for position in a changing pecking order, and under Roosevelt's tutelage, the United States emerged as an economic and military leader.

As the United States government grew in size and power, so did American companies, and big business and government became the target of journalists, novelists, and critics who attempted to expose abuse and corruption. Roosevelt agreed with many of the charges of the muckrakers, a term he coined in a 1906 speech, but he believed that the front-page sensationalism, the yellow journalism, of the muckrakers was irresponsible. One of the foremost practitioners of this style of journalism was Joseph Pulitzer, owner and publisher of the New York *World*, the newspaper that published Speer's famous 1908 editorial. To complicate the matter, Roosevelt and Pulitzer were long-time foes. When Roosevelt read his special message to Congress protesting Speer's editorial, he refrained from attacking Speer; rather, he went straight for his personal adversary, Pulitzer. Roosevelt said: "The real offender is Mr. Joseph Pulitzer, editor and proprietor of the *World*. While the criminal offense of which Mr. Pulitzer has been guilty is in form a libel upon individuals [Roosevelt], the great injury done is in blackening the good name of the American people. It should not be left to a private citizen to sue Mr. Pulitzer for libel. He should be prosecuted for libel by the governmental authorities."

The scandal had gone full circle: First Speer accused Roosevelt of corruption and asked the government to investigate; then Roosevelt accused Pulitzer of libel and asked the government to prosecute. It is important to stress that both parties were flawed. Roosevelt, for all his success as a pivotal American president, was the product of a political climate best known for patriotic fervor and dollar diplomacy. Speer and Pulitzer, for all their talents as pioneer journalists

and publishers, were products of a journalistic milieu characterized by sensationalism and emotional exploitation.

Did Speer libel Roosevelt? Was Roosevelt guilty of corruption? The truth may never be known because on March 31, 1911, the United States Supreme Court decided unanimously that the federal



Cartoon by J. H. Donahey depicting Theodore Roosevelt "doing battle" with Joseph Pulitzer

government had no jurisdiction in the case. Speer's notes indicate that he believed he had solid evidence of Roosevelt's involvement. In what is probably the first draft of an editorial, Speer writes: "The dismissal of the case before Judge Hough precluded *The World* from presenting to a jury of twelve men the great mass of documentary, written and oral evidence in which *The World* had accumulated in proof of its contention that on the disputed question of fact between Theodore Roosevelt and *The World*, *The World* was substantially accurate and Mr. Roosevelt was wholly in error."

Interpreting Speer's notes from the case is difficult because they are cryptic, some even in code, but many can now be verified by the public record. For example, the following note is the first entry on a page titled "MY PRIVATE MEMOR. ON PANAMA.":

The 2 copies of instructions; one here and the other sent down; schedule arranged by T.R. & Cromwell; for revolution to go off on certain day. Am. Gov. wired as per agreement; but (A--- M) the clock did not go off until the next day.

Speer's memorandum is most likely referring to the American government's involvement in the Panamanian revolt of November 3, 1903, which led to the Hay-Banau-Varilla Treaty with Panama on November 17, 1903, giving the United States the strip of land across the Isthmus of Panama in exchange for \$10 million and an annuity of \$250,000, which Speer believed proved financially beneficial to Roosevelt and his associates. In addition, the treaty gave the United States complete control of the canal zone and other defense sites.

The United States helped stage a revolution in Panama because Colombia (which owned Panama at the time) would not agree to the terms of the treaty. In direct violation of an existing treaty, Roosevelt sent an American warship to Panama to prevent Colombian troops from quelling the revolt. These events became a matter of public record, and eighteen years later the United States indemnified Colombia \$25 million for its loss of Panama.

In another personal memorandum Speer offers further insight into his and Roosevelt's involvement in the complex affair. The journalist's source is apparently Senator John Tyler Morgan, of Alabama, who opposed a canal in Panama (favoring a route through Nicaragua) and who sought to expose corrupt American business and political interests in the region. Speer, the memorandum seems to indicate, is acting as some type of intermediary between Manuel Amador de Guerrero, who helped stage the revolt in Panama, and William Nelson Cromwell, an American attorney for the New Panama Canal Company, an ailing French company that tried unsuccessfully to build a canal but still owned the rights to the Isthmus of Panama. Speer writes:

Get full Aff. as for Morgan on Amador, asking me to collect the amount promised him by Cromwell; and the Am. Govt. Also Mr. Roosevelt's agent promised to pay.



Roosevelt in Panama replying to President Amador's welcome,
November 14, 1906

If the United States signed a treaty with Panama, then it would also have to purchase the rights from the French company; therefore, a successful Panamanian revolt was in Cromwell's best interests. Cromwell also worked closely with Philippe Banau-Varilla, a leading figure in the New Panama Canal Company who also happened to be Panama's first minister to the United States. When

Colombia would not agree to the terms of the original treaty, Banau-Varilla did all in his power to make the Panamanian revolution a success.

But why was Speer involved? Perhaps neither Cromwell nor Roosevelt paid Amador the money each had promised for his help in staging the revolution. Amador may have approached Morgan or Speer for help, holding the threat of disclosure over Roosevelt's and Cromwell's heads. This theory may sound far-fetched, but some of Speer's notes indicate that blackmail and cover-ups were common practices. Speer writes:

Explain how Roosevelt hurried down to Panama and made a visit to Amador, when Sen. Morgan began his fight on this subject; How Cromwell & Roosevelt fought to keep it quiet; and how some one in this group told Roosevelt.

In another memorandum, Speer writes:

Cromwell offered me \$1,000,000 for silence; but I was sworn to Sen. Morgan and the Senators who defended me; that I would not compromise with my enemies.

One million dollars was a hefty bribe in the early 1900s. The size of the figure indicates that Cromwell and his associates had a great deal to lose. Speer's December 1908 editorial identifies Cromwell as the leader of the syndicate of American men who bought up inexpensive stock in the nearly bankrupt New Panama Canal Company, stock that soared in price when the United States purchased the rights to the Isthmus of Panama from the "French" company. The company was French on paper, but Speer believed the major stockholders to be American. Following Speer's reasoning, the United States paid *American* businessmen \$40 million for the inflated rights to the isthmus. Speer writes in his editorial:

Why did the United States pay \$40,000,000 for a bankrupt property whose control could undoubtedly have been bought in the open market for less than \$4,000,000?

Who were the new Panama Canal Company?

Who bought up the obligations of the old Panama Canal Company for a few cents on the dollar?

Among whom was divided the \$15,000,000 paid to the new Panama Canal Company?

The unidentified investors in the New Panama Canal Company had taken a considerable risk. Stock in the failing company would have been worthless unless the United States bought the rights to the Isthmus of Panama. After the Walker Commission submitted its report to Congress in 1901 (recommending the Nicaraguan



Political cartoonist Frank Crane summed up the tangled Panama Canal intrigue in the *New York Times*, 1903

route because the United States would not have the added cost of purchasing the French rights to the Panamanian route), Congress leaned in favor of the Nicaraguan route. Speer's notes, however, reveal that investors in the New Panama Canal Company may have had some extra insurance that Congress would ultimately choose the Panamanian route over the Nicaraguan. Speer writes:

How Cromwell started the rumor that Sen. Morgan has his entire private fortune in Nicaragua, and that was the reason why the Sen. wanted that direction instead of Panama; and how that rumor with others at the critical time, swung Panama.

Regardless of the reasons why Congress ultimately chose the Panamanian route, the investors in the New Panama Canal Company enjoyed a huge profit when the United States purchased the

“French” rights. Who were the investors, and why was this information so difficult to trace? An unsigned memorandum from Speer’s papers gives a clue. It begins much like a spy novel:

My informant says: “The meat in the cocoanut [*sic*] is: Who were the stockholders of the Panama Canal? Roosevelt had said that every dollar was paid to the stockholders of the company, but who were the stockholders?

According to this mysterious memorandum, the stock certificates bought by American investors were controlled through a stock pool that operated under a French name. The certificates were left blank and not recorded in the stock transfer book. When the pool sold stock, the record book showed a direct transfer from the original French stockholder to the purchaser.

The author of this mysterious letter offers some additional information as to the identity of some of the stockholders. The letter says:

My informant says that Cromwell made at least \$5,000,000 and that the Tafts were in it. This comes from the soreheads of the old crowd who were not given a chance to participate and I think it is straight.

Many newspapers alleged that future president William H. Taft, his brother Charles P. Taft, and Douglas Robinson, Roosevelt’s brother-in-law, were among the stockholders. But Speer’s notes reveal a second source indicating the Tafts’ involvement—Cromwell—the same man who had on another occasion offered Speer \$1 million for his silence. Speer writes:

When the dispute arose in the Cromwell Synd. as to a proper diversion of the net profits, Mr. C. talked to Mr. Taft over the ‘Phone, and asked him what to do, and Mr. Taft told him to settle as he saw fit; and Mr. C. asked Taft to send him a letter to that effect, in a few days. Mr. Cromwell showed me the letter; where Taft told him to make any financial arrangements that he saw fit; and that he, Taft would approve the arrangement in advance. Cromwell stated that he had vidided [*sic*] all that he had got with R. & Taft.

Speer’s note raises four important questions. Is it possible that Cromwell tried to bribe Taft with his own letter by threatening to

show it to Speer? What was Speer and Cromwell's relationship? Did Speer ever serve the interest of Cromwell? Does the "R" in the note refer to Roosevelt?

The answers to these questions may never be known; however, Speer's papers suggest a world of possibilities. Indeed, Roosevelt may have secured the Isthmus of Panama for his own financial gain and the gain of others, but Speer may not have always been out for the truth but, rather, out for a story.

Our Growing Collections

RUDOLPH ELLENBOGEN

Asadourian gift. Mr. William Asadourian has donated to the Rare Book and Manuscript Library: forty typescripts by Pearl S. Buck; over one hundred letters between Ivy Ledbetter Lee, who is known as the “father of modern public relations,” and his fiancée, Cornelia Bartlett Bigelow, all written in 1901, the year of their marriage; four theatrical posters and associated items relating to the mystic illusionist Fanny Prestige; and fifteen cabinet photographs of nineteenth-century actresses.

Barnes gift. The papers of the late editor Joseph Barnes have been donated to the library by his wife, Mrs. Elizabeth B. Barnes. Included in the gift of over twenty-seven thousand items are correspondence, manuscripts, scrapbooks, notes, clippings, and memorandums related to his work as a member of the staff of the following organizations: the Institute of Pacific Relations, while he was in Russia, Manchuria, Japan, and China during 1931–34; and afterwards at the Office of War Information; the Foreign Policy Association; the New York *Herald Tribune*; the New York *Star*; and Simon & Schuster, during the 1950s and 1960s. Barnes corresponded with, among others, Willy Brandt, Malcolm Cowley, Abraham Flexner, Theodore Kollek, Owen Latimore, Max Lerner, Herbert Matthews, Paul Reynaud, Leo Szilard, and Telford Taylor.

Beeson gift. Mrs. Nora Beeson (A.M., 1948; Ph.D., 1960) has donated nine illustrated Russian books including two published by Academia in Moscow: Alexander Puskin’s *Evgenii Onegin*, 1933; and a volume of tales about Prince Igor, *Slovo o polky Igorevie*, 1934, illustrated by Ivan I. Golikov, best-known artist of the *palekah* style; this book is considered one of the most beautiful books published in the 1920s by Academia.



Decorated binding by Ivan I. Golikov in the *palekab* style of *Slovo o polky Igorevie* (Beeson gift)

Blunden gift. For addition to our extensive collection of Edmund Blunden papers, Mrs. Claire Blunden has donated fourteen letters from Sylva Norman to Edmund Blunden, dating between December 1930 and December 1931. Norman collaborated with Edmund Blunden on their 1932 novel, *We'll Change Our Ground: or, Two on a Tour*, and became his second wife in 1933.

Butcher gift. To his collection of literary research and study of black writers and contemporary social history, Professor Philip Butcher (Ph.D., 1956) has added first editions, periodical issues, photographs, and files of papers relating to James W. Butcher, F. G. Jennifer, Roy S. Simmonds, Judge Clarence Thomas, and others.

Chandler bequest. By bequest, the Rare Book and Manuscript Library has received the papers of the late Professor Margaret K. Chandler, the first female professor at the Graduate School of Business at Columbia. Professor Chandler specialized in conflict resolution, collective bargaining, and decision making, and the more than forty thousand items donated pertain mainly to her teaching in the Masters Degree Program for Executives, the Institute for Not-for-Profit Management, and the Police Management Institute at Columbia.

Dewey gift. Professor Emeritus of Economics Donald Dewey has presented to the libraries *The Whole Works of Adam Smith*, London, 1822. This publication, in five volumes, is the first of Smith's *Works* in duodecimo format and is bound in calf and includes a hitherto unpublished "Life of the Author."

Hyman gift. Dr. Allen Hyman, of the Department of Anesthesiology at the College of Physicians and Surgeons, has presented a copy of Claude Bernard's *Leçons sur les effets des substances toxiques et médicamenteuses*, Paris, 1857, for addition to the Louis and Lena Hyman Collection on the History of Anesthesiology in the Special Collections Section of the Augustus C. Long Health Sciences Library.

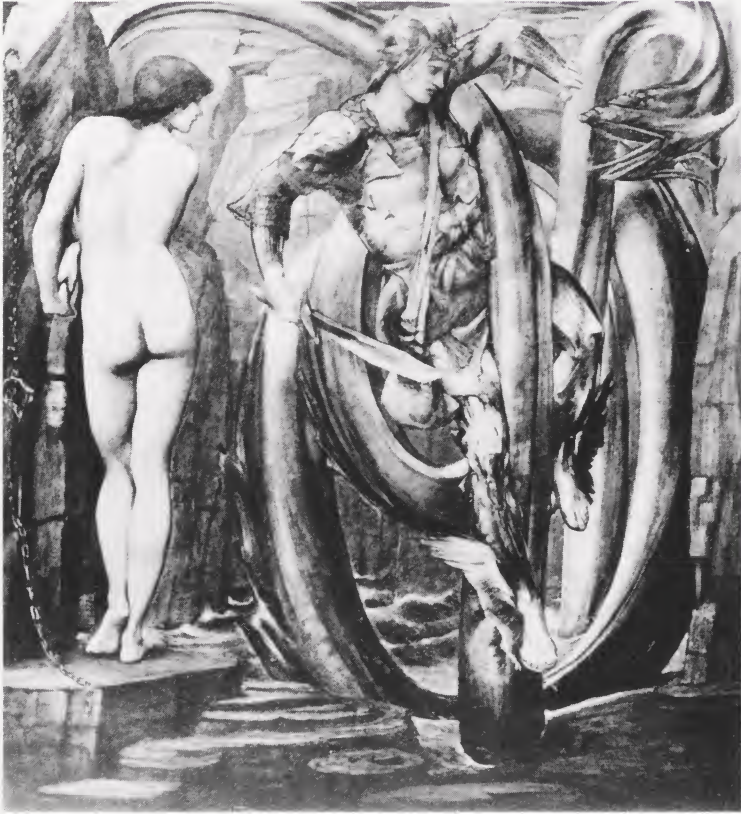
Bernard's text documents his early work with curare as an anesthetic agent. The gift was made in conjunction with the sixteenth annual History of Anesthesiology Lecture cosponsored by the Department of Anesthesiology and the Health Sciences Library.

Lerman gift. Mr. Leo Lerman has presented sixty-four proof copies of contemporary fiction and non-fiction, including works by John Ashbery, Jimmy Carter, James Ellroy, Jerzy Kosinski, Norman Mailer, Iris Murdoch, and John Updike.

Lohf gift. Mr. Kenneth A. Lohf (M.A., 1950; M.S., 1952) has added to his many gifts of the past. To the Arthur Symons Papers, which Mr. Lohf established in 1978, he has donated twenty autograph letters, the majority addressed to Symons's niece, Lucy Bowser Featherston; and the typed manuscript, with corrections and emendations, of Symons's "Introduction to *Oliver Twist*," 1926, published in *Essays of the Year*, 1930. To his own collection of papers, Mr. Lohf has added fifty-six letters written between 1821 and 1941 by English authors and artists, including Hall Caine, Sidney Colvin, Cyril Connolly, Aubrey De Vere, Margaret Gatty, Harry Quilter, and William Sharp (Fiona Macleod). To the book collections, Mr. Lohf has added nearly one hundred volumes, among which are Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Two Poems*, London, 1854, in wrappers; Vivian Locke Ellis's *The Revolt of Woman, and Other Poems*, London, 1910, inscribed to Walter de la Mare; Alexander Gilchrist's *Life of William Blake*, London, 1880, handsomely illustrated from Blake's own works; William Morris's *A Dream of John Ball, and, A King's Lesson*, London, 1888, illustrated by Edward Burne-Jones; Herbert Read's *A World Within a War, Poems*, London, 1944, inscribed by the author; and William Rothenstein's *A Plea for a Wider Use of Artists & Craftsmen*, London, 1916, inscribed by the author, together with a letter of presentation.

McWhinnie gift. Two books for children, *The Green Book for Girls* and *The Violet Book for Girls*, both edited by Mrs. Herbert Strang

and published by Oxford University Press in the 1920s, have been donated by Mr. John McWhinnie for inclusion in the Historical Collection of Children's Literature.



"The Killing of the Monster" by Sir Edward Burne-Jones; illustration in
The Doom of King Acrisius by William Morris (Lohf gift)

Matthews gift. Mr. John L. Matthews, Jr., has added to the papers of Herbert L. Matthews (A.B., 1922) correspondence, photographs, clippings, and a manuscript of an unpublished article entitled "Our Rugged Ancestors," an essay based on Matthews's reading of some two hundred issues of the *Connecticut Courant*, published between



Inscribed photograph of Ava Gardner (Palmer gift)

1814 and 1824. The correspondence also includes an exchange between Matthews and Carlos Baker, author of *Hemingway: A Life Story*, in which Baker requests Matthews to read a first draft of the biography and Matthews records his speculations about Hemingway's breakdown.

Palmer gift. To his past gifts, Mr. Paul R. Palmer (M.S., 1950; A.M., 1955) has added more than fifty volumes including first editions of works by E. F. Benson, Paul Bowles, Rupert Croft-Cooke, David Daiches, Compton MacKenzie, Beverley Nichols, Simon Raven, Ned Rorem, Osbert Sitwell, Gore Vidal, and Virginia Woolf. In addition, there are autographed copies of works by Truman Capote, *The Dogs Bark: Public People and Private Places*, New York, 1973, and Harrison E. Salisbury, *The New Emperors: China in the Era of Mao and Deng*, Boston, 1992. Mr. Palmer's interest in theater and film is represented by the gift of works by Constance Collier and Errol Flynn, as well as Lawrence Olivier's *On Acting*, London, 1986, in an edition limited to three hundred numbered and signed copies. The gift also includes forty-four portraits of theater and film stars from the period 1910 to the 1960s, many inscribed or autographed, including portraits of Richard Barthelmess, Katharine Cornell, Joseph Cotton, Richard Cromwell, Irene Dunne, Dan Duryea, Nelson Eddy, Richard Egan, Ava Gardner, Helen Hayes, Edward Everett Horton, Gene Kelly, Frederic March, Douglass Montgomery, Barbara Stanwyck, and Constance Talmadge.

Raphaelson gift. Mr. Joel Raphaelson has added approximately fourteen thousand letters, manuscripts, and documents to the papers of his father, Samson Raphaelson. The gift is comprised of: play scripts, film scripts, and production materials for, among others, *The Jazz Singer*, *Shop Around the Corner*, and *Trouble in Paradise*; articles and autobiographical writings, including his "Freundschaft: The Last Time I Saw Lubitsch" about Ernst Lubitsch, published in the *New Yorker* in May 1981; and short stories. Raphaelson's correspondents include Alfred Hitchcock, Elia Kazin, Archibald MacLeish, and Terence Rattigan.

Roscoe gift. Mrs. Rosamond Roscoe has presented an addition to the papers of her late husband, Theodore Roscoe, comprising approximately twenty thousand items of correspondence, manuscripts, and research notes for his books *The Web of Conspiracy* and *The Lin-*

coln Assassination. In addition, there are extensive files of handwritten and typed transcripts and photocopies of numerous nineteenth-century American letters, manuscripts, diaries, and documents relating to the Civil War. The gift also includes material for other published and unpublished writings by Mr. Roscoe, including *The Trent Affair*, *Drama in Black*, *Only in New England*, and *To Live and Die in Dixie*.

Sykes gift. From the library of the late Gerald Sykes, Mrs. Claire Sykes has donated sixty-one volumes of fiction, poetry, and other literary works, including several American first editions by James Aldridge, Janet Frame, John Hawkes, and Randall Jarrell. Of special interest are T. S. Eliot's *The Classics and the Man of Letters*, London, 1942, in wrappers, and *Upton Sinclair Presents William Fox*, Los Angeles, 1933, inscribed by the author. To her husband's papers, Mrs. Sykes has added photographs, clippings, and approximately fifty letters written primarily during the 1970s by editors, publishers, and other writers to Sykes. Included is a letter from Lawrence Durrell, dated Gard, France, July 18, 1983, regarding his health, his feelings about aging, and their writings.

Tilton gift. Professor Emeritus Eleanor M. Tilton has donated to the Rare Book and Manuscript Library her professional papers and library related to her teaching and research on Ralph Waldo Emerson, Oliver Wendell Holmes, and other nineteenth-century English and American authors. Also in her library of more than two thousand volumes are works on art, philosophy, and history. Of particular note are two hundred rare editions including works by James Fenimore Cooper, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Oliver Wendell Holmes, William Dean Howells, Washington Irving, Henry James, Wallace Stevens, and Anthony Trollope. Included in the gift is Herman Melville's *Israel Potter*, New York, 1855, third edition, signed by Melville's brother Allan; James Russell Lowell's copy of George

Puttenham's *The Arte of English Poesie*, London, 1869; and the first edition of Emerson's *Poems*, Boston, 1847, inscribed, "Elizabeth Hoar from her affectionate brother Waldo. 25 December, 1846." Hoar became an adopted sister of the Emersons on the death of their brother, Charles, to whom she was engaged; she was a confidante of Emerson and a touchstone for his ideas.

Weil gift. Mr. James L. Weil has donated two editions of poems by English romantic poets that he has published: Percy Bysshe Shelly's *Ozymandias*, one of fifty copies, a keepsake marking the bicentennial of the birth of the poet on August 4, 1992, handsomely printed by the Kelly-Winterton Press on Velke Losiny paper from Emerson and Augustea types; and John Keats's "*Dear Reynolds*," one of fifty copies printed on the Officina Bodoni handpress in a variant of the Dante type by Martino Mardersteig, 1991.



CONTRIBUTORS TO THIS ISSUE

RUDOLPH ELLENBOGEN is Assistant Librarian for Rare Books.

TERRENCE J. McDONALD is professor of history at the University of Michigan and editor of a new edition of *Plunkitt of Tammany Hall* to be published in the spring of 1993 by Bedford Books of St. Martin's Press.

JEAN WITTER is editor at Columbia's Office of University Publications and a free-lance writer and editor.

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